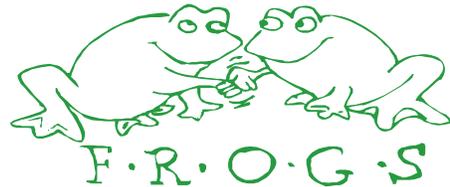


FROGS FANFAIR

APRIL 2004



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BEST LAID PLANS

An account of the recent visit to The Gambia by Sally, Brenda, Anne, Dave and Barbara

The best laid plans of mice and men go wrong. How true that is and it applies to FROGS too!

On January 31st, when we loaded three containers, we thought that our timing was perfect and that all was going smoothly. However that was not to be.

The first change in plans was to load a fourth container. Then the ship they were due to sail on was withdrawn for maintenance, and the arrival date in Banjul was given as 26th February. This however did not happen, as on the 18th February, two days before the FROGS party was due to depart, the containers were still in Felixstowe, a new sailing date not known.

So it was time for another change of plan. This time to extend Sally and Brenda's stay by one week. The vessel eventually sailed on the 19th February, with an estimated arrival of the 2nd March. Not too bad!

The team arrived in The Gambia on the 20th February and after a relaxing weekend started a round of school visits. Using transport provided by the Gambian Scout Association, sixteen schools were visited during the first week - lower and upper basic schools, nurseries and skills centres, all within reasonable travelling distance, returning to the hotel each evening. The visits were either to assess needs for future containers or to check on development after receiving help from FROGS.

Also set into motion was a refurbishment project at Bakau LBS - the year 5 block, on behalf of King Edward's School, Edgebaston and Jeanette Durman. Video recording of the project was started.

Over the next weekend we attended an Independence Parade of the Nursery Schools in Region 1 (see report elsewhere in this Newsletter) and a quiz hosted by a youth organisation involved in HIV/AIDS awareness in the villages.

Week two started with visits to the Ministry Offices and Regional Directors, plus various schools in Banjul. We then had an unexpected day off. Muslim New Year. Nobody works!

Wednesday the 3rd and the containers still had not arrived. The e.t.a. had been moved to the 5th. Gambia Maybe Time! So we organised a visit to the North Bank and saw four schools between Barra and Kerewan. One of these

was a lovely nursery school, new to us and deserving of our support in the future.

On Thursday the 4th we visited Fajara Skills Centre. They did not need our help. A well-set up unit. We were then treated to lunch at Muhammeden School, followed by entertainment by the school drama group, and a presentation of thank you gifts.

The end of the second week, and it was time for Anne to return home, but not until after a visit to Yaharr's nursery school and a brief call at Bakau to film the progress of the classroom refurbishment. Three floors tiled and trees removed. Sally, Brenda, Dave and Barbara moved house. The new location was Dave and Barbara's time-share, sleeping in the lounge.

Saturday was free, so we visited the British High Commission's Charity Garden Fete. A typical English fete, with stalls, sideshows and arena events in the Residence garden as well as "The Red Barrows Formation Team", waiter's obstacle race and believe it or not Scottish Country Dancing with kilts and socks in 40-degree heat! Who said the English are mad!



Dancing in full Highland dress in 40-degree heat!

On Sunday we had coffee with FROGS member Brenda Whorley who arrived on the Friday flight. Still no firm news, but a rumour that the ship had docked.

Monday and news at last confirming that the unloading and handover of the containers can take place next day. What a relief! Schools in the Western division were visited, including Jamisa - a very sad school that we are hoping to help considerably.

On Tuesday the 9th the first container arrived at 10.30 a.m. Unloaded one at a time; the fourth container was well under way when we broke off for the handover ceremony. All the usual guests from the Ministry, the schools and the community attended. After a short ceremony we finished the unloading and were clear by 6 p.m. with no incident or damage.



Unloading the containers at last!

Wednesday saw us return to distribute the unallocated items and when that was done we celebrated in our favourite restaurant.

Our penultimate day saw us visit Old Jeshwang, a much-improved school since our last visit and then the Home Economics Centre for lunch with Sarah the Principal.

The last evening of a long trip was spent with Sainabou and Marie, Head and Deputy Head of Bakau Newtown, who do all the organising and put up with FROGS disrupting their school life each time containers arrive.

Departure day and an early start visiting Bakau to film the latest development in their refurbishment project, where great progress is being made. Then school assembly, back to the hotel, pack and leave for the airport. Trouble over and behind us. No way!

The x-ray machines at the airport had broken down and every suitcase had to be opened for inspection. Finally onto the plane.

Mission accomplished! Eventually!

FROGS HOP AWAY Malcolm Reader, Chairman, FROGS

Members and friends of FROGS will be very aware of the massive progress Friends of Gambian Schools have made during the past few years. Indeed many members of FROGS will have noted that this progress coincided with the acquisition of the massive No. 8 stockroom at Aylesford Newsprint.

When the mill announced the need to take the storage bay back into mill use, the first priority was to plan on how to

empty it. With nowhere else to go, the only answer was to send as much material as possible to The Gambia.

And so we planned to bring three 40-foot sea containers on site one wet and windy day in January, and a highly successful loading day was carried out. However, at the end of the day a large amount of material was left over, and although we had prioritised the material loaded, much good stuff was still here. What to do? All of our funds had been spent on the three containers, and time was not on our side.

Fortunately a Fairy Godmother in the form of one of our most enthusiastic members offered to advance sufficient funds for a fourth container (£3,000) so we immediately booked it for five days later, so that it could join the first three on the ship.

We squeezed every last thing we could into that container, and when it finally departed there was still material left over, but we had not only broken the back of it, but broken FROGS' records by shipping four containers on one ship!

This effort brought the total of containers loaded in No. 8 bay to 11 over two years, the number of schools in The Gambia helped to 250, and the total number of FROGS containers sent to 27.

FROGS will now have to be scaled down. Already we are refusing material being offered by schools in Kent and elsewhere. The hunt is on for new premises.

But one thing is for certain; we will never forget the splendid two years spent in No. 8 bay, for the help and assistance freely given by the staff of ANL, and the gratitude of the teachers and children of the schools in The Gambia who have benefited from this help.

VIEW OF FROGS FROM A TEACHER IN THE GAMBIA

***Marie Bakourey, Deputy Head, Bakau Newtown Lower
Basic School***

FROGS has been working with Gambian schools since 1993. Over 200 schools across the country ranging from Nursery Schools, Lower Basic, Upper Basic and Senior Secondary schools have benefited from FROGS.

The Gambian Government recently called for education for all, with great emphasis on accessibility, quality and relevance. FROGS could be named as one of those organisations that is contributing greatly in helping the Gambian Government achieve its aim.

Over the years FROGS has sent 27 containers to my country, all carrying educational materials, books, furniture and clothing.

FROGS is a charity committed to the poor and as well as helping schools it helps churches, skill centres and health centres.

In a nutshell, FROGS is contributing immensely to the welfare of so many needy Gambian children.

THE 'EYES' HAVE IT!
Brenda Sladen

Thanks to Alisdair Buchanan, my Optician in Snodland, Kent, many teachers in The Gambia who have an up to date prescription are being supplied with new spectacles. They have been measured and have selected the frame of their choice. The rest is up to Alisdair who has made this great offer.

GAMBIA'S FUTURE SAFE – IN LITTLE HANDS!
Barbara Jordan

Saturday 28th February 2004, 10a.m found us in the Independence Stadium, Bakau, as the guests of hundreds of children from approximately 90 Nursery Schools of Region 1.

The children aged 3-7yrs had formed earlier around the race track and were eagerly awaiting the arrival of the dignitaries – child representatives of all Embassies in traditional clothing and ladies in dark suits carrying handbags - to fill the VIP Podium. These duly arrived in vehicles escorted by security guards in smart suits and fluorescent "shades" along with guards armed with water pistols in vivid colours - all these under the age of 8yrs.



The Dignitaries seated in the VIP Podium

The last to arrive was the Mayor of Bakau - all 1 metre of him - complete with chain of office and wife. We were honoured when he stopped to shake hands with all of us! He then inspected the guard of honour formed by a Scout Group and was escorted by his security guards and soldiers.

The Nursery Schools then marched very smartly past the Podium with a banner proclaiming their name eg - Sunrise Nursery School, Child Alone, Apple Tree, Archdeacon Matthias George Memorial Nursery School and our own Agi Awa Bah nursery school (Yaharr's), all in their own uniforms of blue or purple tie-die, red checks, green and yellow, reds and browns.

They formed up in a rainbow of colours before the Mayor to hear his speech. This was performed confidently and clearly without looking at his notes.



The March Past!

It was thrilling to see all the children and staff and to realise that all this work is going on with pre-schoolchildren with little help from the government, and we have only 10 of these schools on our lists requesting help.

BONKERZ!
An interview with the boys from Platt School
by Vivien Gainsborough-Foot

There is a truly amazing group of boys who attend Platt C. of E. Primary School, St.Mary's Platt, near Borough Green and we should salute them. They are already well known in the locality having been interviewed by Radio Kent and the Sevenoaks Chronicle.

Entirely on their own initiative and after hearing a talk on the good work that FROGS achieves in the Gambia, the group of 10 have produced 6 issues of a most amusing magazine since April 2003, going by the name of Bonkerz! According to Charles Gibson, one of the group, copies of Bonkerz! have been sold all over the UK and into Europe, raising £250 to date for FROGS. Joseph Melville informs me that the 7th issue is now being produced.

It says much for the school and for the editor, Alex Jenden, that the magazine has been such a success. Freedom of expression is encouraged in the children at Platt and they are urged to think for themselves. Alex has been the force behind the creation of Bonkerz! and says that the reason for starting the magazine was because they really wanted to make a difference; Patrick Cremin agrees but adds that it was the terrible poverty in the Gambia that inspired them and points out that it is most unusual for such an imaginative magazine to be produced by primary school pupils.

The magazine is an amalgam of jokes, stories, puzzles and sports news and Richard Higson remarks that it is not difficult to sell as people like to give to charity; but it has to be said that the magazine sells on its own merits as it is both comical and original. James Wagstaff believes the magazine sells so well because it has not focussed on one subject but is full of different items and ideas while Andrew Tucker thinks that the group's keenness to make

money for the Gambia entuses the whole team. Most of the jokes are supplied by Chris Slater who downloads them from the internet, and also has a very funny Dad – lucky boy.

George Hancock tells me that the boys were only 9 or ten years old when the idea came to them and Alastair Field considers that people are particularly generous because it is 10 year olds who have worked hard to produce Bonkerz! It is Alastair who is the talented artist and draws the cartoons and comic strips.

Mrs. Netti, the Form Teacher, comments how proud she is of her pupils, how well they have worked as a team and what a success it has been over the year. Because these boys are now going on to secondary education they are busy looking for successors to carry on the good work. Alex recognises that girls should be encouraged to join the group as they have already written an excellent netball review for the sports pages.

Writing the magazine, with all its creative ingenuity, consumes many hours of the boys' time - it is a huge achievement and one that is very much to be admired.

The Friends of Gambian Schools are enormously grateful to the team for its commitment and attainments.



The boys from St. Mary's Platt School

MEMBERSHIP FEES

FROGS Membership Fees became due on 1st April. If you haven't paid please send your cheques as soon as possible. £5 for families and £3 for concessions or your name will be removed from the Mailing List.

EMAIL AND WEBSITE

Don't forget to send your email address to the Editor sue@airclean.co.uk, for future Newsletters. Any information or articles can be sent as well.

Those of you with web access watch out for our Website on www.friendsofgambianschools.co.uk which is to be launched shortly.

LOST DIARY!

Our Treasurer, Lynne Davies, has mislaid her Diary of her visit to The Gambia in 2000. If anyone has it, or knows of its whereabouts could you please contact Lynne. It is an A3, black covered portfolio. Lynne would be very grateful to have this precious Diary back. Thank you.

FUTURE EVENTS

**OPEN GARDEN AT THE VENTURE, KITS COTY
SATURDAY 22ND MAY
11 a.m – 5 p.m.**

**Come along to see Sally's Prizewinning Garden
Refreshments and Plant Sales
Entry Fee £1 per person**

SUMMER FAYRE

Joint venture with The Friars

SUNDAY 27TH JUNE

PLEASE PUT THIS DATE IN YOUR DIARIES

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED TO MAN STALLS

Contact Sally if you are able to help

WANTED!

Typewriters – electric and manual, ribbons and carbons.

Sewing Machines – electric and manual, cottons.

We also need volunteers to check that the above items are in working order, and also Jigsaw and Game checkers - please get in touch with Sally if you can help.

Garden tools especially hand forks and trowels.

Woodwork and metalwork tools.

Kitchen utensils suitable for Home Economics lessons.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

To attend Boot Fairs on FROGS behalf – merchandise available at the Friars Store.

To be Car Park Stewards at the Museum of Kent Life Cobtree, Lock Lane, Sandling, Maidstone to help raise funds for FROGS on the following dates:

Monday 3rd May 2004

Sunday 30th and Monday 31st May 2004

Monday 30th August 2004

Saturday 4th and Sunday 5th September 2004

Sunday 10th October 2004

Saturday 6th November 2004

Please contact Sally if you are able to help.

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